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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1. U.S.-Israel Relations](#)
- [2. Aftermath of Israeli Elections](#)
- [3. Iran](#)
- [4. Mideast](#)

Key stories in the media:

All media led with last night's fruitless meeting between Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu and Kadima chair Tzipi Livni. Whereas Netanyahu stressed the importance of unity, Livni was quoted as saying that they had deep differences on diplomatic issues. Livni asked Netanyahu to recognize the principle of two states for two peoples. However, she agreed to hold further unity talks with Netanyahu. Maariv reported that Netanyahu told Livni that they should try out another creative idea. The media reported that the only Kadima leader who is interested in joining the Likud-led coalition is Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz. Haaretz reported that the right-wing parties have softened their stances before their talks with Likud.

Leading media reported that PM Ehud Olmert suspended Amos Gilad, who heads the Defense Ministry's political-security bureau, from his position as negotiator with Egypt and indirectly with Hamas. Gilad had criticized Olmert's conduct in the matter of the negotiations, in particular the issue of Gilad Shalit's release.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that two visiting congressmen -- Brian Baird (D-WA) and Keith Ellison (D-MN) -- told the newspaper that banning lentils and pasta from Gaza does not help the cause of peace.

The Jerusalem Post, Haaretz, and Israel Radio reported that the human rights group Amnesty International called on the U.S. to stop weapons sales to Israel and on all countries to impose an arms embargo on both Israel and the Palestinians. The media cited the Foreign Ministry as saying that Amnesty's report ignores the fact that Hamas is a terrorist organization that is so recognized by the U.S., the EU, and other countries.

The media reported that Iran's nuclear reactor at Bushehr will become active this week.

Media reported that Yisrael Beiteinu officials have launched a public relations campaign to tell the U.S., Europe, and the Arab world that there is nothing to fear from Avigdor Lieberman's initiative to add an oath of allegiance to Israel's Citizenship Law.

Israel's ambassador to Italy, Gideon Meir, warned the Foreign Ministry that Arab countries are conducting a campaign to demonize Lieberman in Europe. Yisrael Beiteinu's PR efforts are being spearheaded by Israel's former ambassador to the U.S., Daniel Ayalon, who is number seven on the party's Knesset list. The right-wing party is the third largest faction in the new Knesset, following Kadima and Likud. In two weeks, Ayalon is to take Yisrael Beiteinu's case to the U.S. with the number two on the list, Uzi Landau, and number 12, Hamad Amar, who is Druze. Avigdor Lieberman met yesterday with U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman. The Yisrael Beiteinu chairman said it was important to act quickly against Iran's nuclear program. "If we want a peace process we have to work first against Iran," he told the Senator.

Yesterday The Jerusalem Post quoted State Department Acting Deputy Spokesman Gordon Duguid as saying that the U.S. remained dedicated to a two-state solution and that it would continue to work for this goal regardless of who is in office in Israel.

Maariv quoted a senior Israel defense source as saying that U.S. special envoy George Mitchell will follow up on doings in the territories and that he will not put up with excuses. The source was quoted as saying that Mitchell's bureau in Israel will be Obama's long arm.

Leading media reported that yesterday Palestinian militants in Gaza fired two mortar rounds at IDF soldiers near the border. Meanwhile, Egypt yesterday opened its Rafah border crossing with Gaza to let students, third-country residents, and medical patients stranded in the Strip cross the usually closed border. Also yesterday, the media quoted Gaza medics as saying that five Palestinians were found dead in a smuggling tunnel under the border with Egypt.

Over the weekend the media reported that a rocket fired from Lebanon struck northern Israel on Saturday, lightly wounding five people and prompting Israel to respond with a brief artillery barrage.

The media reported on ongoing Fatah-Hamas reconciliation talks.

Yesterday The Jerusalem Post quoted a PA official as saying over the weekend that the Obama administration has given the PA a Qgreen lightQ to talk to Hamas about forming a Palestinian unity government.

HaQaretz quoted French Jewish leader Laurence Borot as saying yesterday that Elie Wiesel and a number of other high-profile Jewish leaders will take part in demonstrations in Geneva against the UN-sponsored Durban Review Conference. The governments of Israel and Canada are so far the only ones to officially declare a boycott of the meeting. HaQaretz quoted Richard Heideman, a Washington-based lawyer and honorary president of B'nai B'rith, as saying that the chances that President Obama will boycott a conference against racism are slim.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that rabbis and imams in the U.S. have embarked on a campaign to prevent anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim activities.

The media reported that protests by Israeli Christians over the weekend against a segment of a Channel 10-TV talk show last week prompted PM Olmert to apologize to the Christian community at yesterdayQs cabinet meeting. Olmert was referring to the storm of protest over a skit on the late-night talk show hosted by Lior Shlein, called "Like a Virgin." Following Olmert's statement, the Vatican released an official statement noting that the skit desecrated the sanctity of Mary and Jesus, and that it was a "vulgar and offensive act of intolerance." The Vatican also said it regretted that such an attack was directed against Mary and Jesus, "children of Israel." Olmert also called on tennis player Andy Ram to boycott the Dubai tournament, for which the UAE has granted him a visa.

Maariv reported that Olmert, DM Ehud Barak, and IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi are being sued for 183 million shekels (around \$44 million) at the Nazareth District Court over an IDF shelling that resulted in the deaths of 11 members of a Gazan family in the Jabalya refugee camp during Operation Cast lead.

Yediot reported that Morris Talansky is expected to return to Israel in a month to testify in the affair of OlmertQs cash envelopes. Yediot reported that Qhundreds of thousandsQ of non-Jewish immigrants became Israeli citizens under the Law of Return over the past decade.

Leading media reported that Arnold (Arnie) Zaler, who fled to Jerusalem last March to escape 30 counts of fraud in Colorado, has flown back to the U.S. and turned himself in after having allegedly scammed numerous Israelis during his 11 months here.

The media reported on the death yesterday at 61 of Dan Scemama, reporter, editor, and Israel TV news anchor. During the First Lebanon War, he bared the discontent of IDF soldiers. In 2003 Scemama entered Iraq secretly with reporter Boaz Bismuth to cover the first stages of the war, but was expelled by American forces.

1. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Giora Eiland, former Director of the National Security Council, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QThe most important component of Israeli policy on Iran depends on our ability to persuade the U.S. to make concessions to Russia (and China) on other issues, since the Iranian issue is more important.

Block Quotes:

"Enlist Obama"

Giora Eiland, former Director of the National Security Council, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/22): QThe Israeli premier will be making a mistake if he makes do merely

with rejecting the American position and biding his time. The right thing to do is to persuade the U.S. administration to reassess its fundamental premises. The meeting between Netanyahu and Obama needs to be held after people who work under the President are persuaded that it would be worthwhile holding an Israeli-American dialogue to clarify the fundamental premises prior to renewing political negotiations.... A necessary precondition in persuading Russia [to stop Iran's nuclear program] is American willingness to be forthcoming with Russia on other issues. The most important component of Israeli policy on Iran depends on our ability to persuade the U.S. to make concessions to Russia (and China) on other issues, since the Iranian issue is more important. The differences between Israel and Obama's United States are differences on two other issues, Syria and Lebanon. The two leaders must not be permitted to meet until a serious dialogue is held between Obama's staff (which is already up and working) and Netanyahu's staff, which hasn't been defined yet.

12. Aftermath of Israeli Elections:

Summary:

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: QIf the right wing government is successful, Kadima will have much cause to regret that it is not also clipping the coupon.

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QIf [Livni] is convinced that Netanyahu is doomed to failure, it would be best for her to serve the country in the opposition.

Block Quotes:

1I. "An Illogical Refusal"

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (2/23): QLet us suppose that Netanyahu is interested in continuing the peace process but he has no majority to do this unless he has the backing of Kadima or Labor. So what should be done? Should he be denied maneuvering ability across the international scene simply in order to punish him for having won the election? It is true that Kadima and Labor should not join the government at any price. There is no real thing as Qany price. But if Netanyahu is willing and interested in paying a hefty price in the government's guidelines and its conduct in order to get Livni and/or Barak into his coalition, they have no moral right to refuse to discuss this.... If the right wing government is successful, Kadima will have much cause to regret that it is not also clipping the coupon; and if this government fails, Kadima is destined to be remembered for the entire next Knesset as the party that turned a cold shoulder to an entire nation at a critical moment of its history.

II. "Free Is Completely Alone"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/23): QIf we assume for a moment that [Netanyahu and Livni] have something to talk about, the second question immediately arises: Is Netanyahu capable of betraying his partners on the Right? Shamir and Sharon betrayed their right wing partners without difficulty. They said that they preferred the national interest to promises given under duress. Netanyahu, despite the image of crook that has been pinned on him throughout the years, or perhaps because of this image, will find it difficult to betray them. A broad government can only justify its existence if it is as lean as possible. Netanyahu will have to recognize his limitations: He cannot bring his friends into this bed. Livni will also have to recognize her limitations: One does not come to such a bed to jump out of it at the first opportunity. If she is convinced that Netanyahu is doomed to failure, it would be

best for her to serve the country in the opposition.

13. Iran:

Summary:

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz: QFrom Israel's perspective, President Barack Obama is a key player in the Iranian drama.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: Q[Containment] is certainly not a viable QPlan BQ Qto the prospect of a failed engagement policy. And engagement, while arguably worth a try, is no substitute for the kind of sanctions that could yet prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapons capacity that threatens far more than the Middle East.

Block Quotes:

"Israel Is Waiting for ObamaQs Lead"

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz (2/23): QFrom Israel's perspective, President Barack Obama is a key player in the Iranian drama. Although Obama has more urgent things on his agenda -- first and foremost among them the rehabilitation of the U.S. economy -- Iran will be his first major foreign-policy test. Israel regards Obama's decision to talk to Tehran about its nuclear program as a done deal. What it is trying to do, in a low-profile way, is to impact the way the Americans reach the point of dialogue.... When and if talks fail, Israel would expect the U.S. to head an international move for immediate and harsher sanctions, this time effectively involving Russia, China and India. The assumption is that Obama will find it easier than Bush to urge the world to pressure Iran, especially after he shows he has taken dialogue as far as it can go. Israel would prefer for the Americans to condition their talks with Iran on freezing uraniQ enrichment during the talks.

II. QObamaQs Plan B?

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/23): QAs part of a policy of containment, there is talk of a US declaration that an attack on the Jewish state would be viewed as an attack against the United States. How credible would that be? To undermine just such a pledge, Iran could surreptitiously transfer a nuclear device to Hizbullah-controlled Lebanon or to Hamastan. Pakistan, the only other Muslim state to go nuclear, proliferated to Iran. Tehran could be expected to carry on the tradition. In fact, containment may simply not apply to an apocalyptic messianic regime. It is certainly not a viable QPlan BQ Qto the prospect of a failed engagement policy. And engagement, while arguably worth a try, is no substitute for the kind of sanctions -- a complete blockade, for instance -- that could yet prevent Iran from having a nuclear weapons capacity that threatens far more than the Middle East.

14. Mideast:

Summary:

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of the

independent, left-leaning HaQaretz: QWashington, under Barack Obama's administration, is liable to be more attentive to the idea of an Israel-Syrian agreement.

Block Quotes:

"From Gaza to Damascus"

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz (2/23): QEven if the Hamas government in Gaza is deterred from another military conflict, it is strong enough to prevent the Palestinian Authority-led government in the West Bank from making the concessions necessary to reach a deal with Israel. The chances look more promising on the Syrian track. Syria's path to its goals passes through the United States, and for that it needs Israel. Washington, under Barack Obama's administration, is liable to be more attentive to the idea of an Israel-Syrian agreement. A unity government in Israel may be the only realistic course by which to strive for political progress in the coming years.

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